CLAIM AMENDMENTS

1-18 (cancelled)

19 (currently amended) ~~The method of claim 1,~~ In a system comprising:

a root entity, the root entity maintaining a root certification authority adapted to issue a digital certificate to a first participant and a second participant, the root entity further maintaining a central repository;

the first participant maintaining a first certification authority adapted to issue a digital certificate to a first customer;

the second participant maintaining a second certification authority adapted to issue a digital certificate to a second customer;

a method for providing authorization services, comprising:

generating by the second customer an authorization request to confirm the authority of an individual to act on behalf of the first customer;

transmitting the authorization request from the second customer to the second participant;

transmitting the authorization request from the second participant to the first participant;

retrieving at the first participant information concerning the authority of the individual to act on behalf of the first customer and one or more rules for responding to the authorization request;

generating by the first participant an authorization response using the retrieved information and rules;

transmitting the response from the first participant to the second participant; and

transmitting the response from the second participant to the second customer;

wherein the first participant responds to the authorization request with a positive response only if the authorization request includes a purchase order signed by the individual.

20 (currently amended) ~~The method of claim 1,~~ In a system comprising:

a root entity, the root entity maintaining a root certification authority adapted to issue a digital certificate to a first participant and a second participant, the root entity further maintaining a central repository;

the first participant maintaining a first certification authority adapted to issue a digital certificate to a first customer;

the second participant maintaining a second certification authority adapted to issue a digital certificate to a second customer;

a method for providing authorization services, comprising:

generating by the second customer an authorization request to confirm the authority of an individual to act on behalf of the first customer;

transmitting the authorization request from the second customer to the second participant;

transmitting the authorization request from the second participant to the first participant;

retrieving at the first participant information concerning the authority of the individual to act on behalf of the first customer and one or more rules for responding to the authorization request;

generating by the first participant an authorization response using the retrieved information and rules;

transmitting the response from the first participant to the second participant; and

transmitting the response from the second participant to the second customer;

wherein the first participant responds to the authorization request with a positive response only if the authorization request includes an offer to enter into a contract by the individual.